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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000693

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: NON PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION REJECTS  
CALLS FOR DIALOGUE

REF: A. TBILISI 679  
[1](#)B. TBILISI 660  
[1](#)C. TBILISI 657  
[1](#)D. TBILISI 618

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary/Comment: While public calls for dialogue increase, the non-parliamentary opposition remains adamant that they will only discuss the terms of President Saakashvili's resignation. The Patriarch, the Ambassador, the EU, President Saakashvili, Christian Democrats and business leaders have all publicly and repeatedly called for dialogue, but the calls appear to be falling on deaf ears. By rejecting any sort of dialogue, the non-parliamentary opposition appears willing to hand the President the moral high ground politically and to gamble that a large turnout on April 9 will push Saakashvili and his government to make concessions. With the Patriarch (considered the most trustworthy figure in Georgia) calling for calm and dialogue, the non-parliamentary opposition is taking a sizable political risk by rejecting talks outright and planning on engaging in non-stop protests. Despite taking a tack that looks increasingly politically tone deaf, the non-parliamentary opposition is charging straight ahead. If the April 9 protests do not produce regime change, the non-parliamentary leaders may find themselves with little political space in which to maneuver. End Summary/Comment.

#### Patriarch Speaks - People Listen

[1](#)2. (C) The recent IRI poll (March 2009) demonstrates the continuing powerful appeal of the Georgian Orthodox Church with the church getting a 91 percent favorable rating across Georgia. The Patriarch, who is immensely popular and respected, repeated his calls for dialogue during his sermon on April 7, Georgia's Day of the Annunciation. He called on all sides to engage in dialogue saying "I hope we'll understand each other and learn to listen to each other". This message follows his similar previous public statements urging the same. While always cautious in his public pronouncements, the Patriarch's message is clear to Georgians -- that constant protests and ultimatums are not viewed positively by the church, echoing his more candid private statements to the Ambassador (ref C). While the overall effect of the Patriarch's statements is unquantifiable, refusing to negotiate and ignoring the Patriarch's urging can only work to the non-parliamentary opposition's political detriment.

#### Saakashvili Sees Where the Political Winds are Blowing

[1](#)3. (C) Traveling in the regions, President Saakashvili stated on April 7, that "there is no alternative to dialogue," and reiterated his proposal to the non-parliamentary opposition that he and the GoG are willing and able to engage. Saakashvili continued saying that "dialogue is needed with even the smallest and most radical groups as well, no matter how unacceptable their demands might be, because Georgia simply does not have an

alternative." Saakashvili's comments echo those of the Patriarch and the EU, which released a statement that in part read "the people of Georgia can only benefit from political pluralism and constructive political dialogue between the Government and the opposition." Regardless of Saakashvili's motives, the call for dialogue appears to be a smart play politically and generally in line with broad popular sentiment.

#### Non-Parliamentary Opposition Defiant

14. (C) Alliance for Georgia leader Irakli Alasania called the President's calls for dialogue an "inadequate" reaction. Former Presidential Candidate Levan Gachechiladze said that "(d)ialogue will only take place live on air and only if Q"(d)ialogue will only take place live on air and only if Saakashvili bows to the demands of the people and resigns." In an April 7 briefing to the diplomatic corps and subsequent press conference in which most non-parliamentary leaders attended, a press release contained only one demand - Saakashvili's resignation - and ominously called on the international community "to refrain from any kind of interference during the crisis by trying to comfort the President." Nino Burjanadze in a meeting with Congressmen John Tanner (D-TN) and Congresswoman Jo Ann Emerson (R-MO), completely ruled out the idea of dialogue calling Saakashvili untrustworthy and anti-democratic. Burjanadze rejected out of hand that President Saakashvili should be allowed to serve out his term in office. Even among the non-parliamentary opposition, any signal that dialogue could be acceptable is quickly shouted down. On Maestro TV when David Gamkrelidze (Alliance for Georgia) indicated that dialogue was theoretically possible if President Saakashvili made a number

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of major concessions (including the "return" of Imedi to Badri Patarkatsashvili's family and the dismissal of the heads of the Central Election Commission and Supreme Court), e was quickly interrupted by Levan Gachechiladze who said the non-parliamentary opposition would never agree to any dialogue.  
TEFFT